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## Aulas en Paz (Classrooms in Peace): 2. Teaching Strategies

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### Abstract:

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In recent times citizenship competencies have arisen as a very valuable alternative for education for democracy and peace. The formative evaluation of the *Aulas en Paz* program has provided for analyzing various teaching strategies for the development of eight citizenship competencies which are essential for constructive conflict handling and the prevention of aggression – i.e. handling anger, empathy, distance-taking, creative generation of alternatives, considering consequences, active listening, assertiveness, and questioning beliefs.

Preliminary results of the *Aulas en Paz* program were published in the previous issue of this Journal. This paper supplements the previous one by highlighting the teaching strategies that have been most successful in getting these citizenship competencies put into practice in an environment which is motivating and significant for the students.

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## Aulas en Paz:

### 2. Teaching Strategies

In recent times, citizenship competencies have arisen as a very valuable alternative for guiding citizenship education (Chaux & Velásquez, in press; Cox, Jaramillo & Reimers, 2005). Citizenship competencies are all those emotional, cognitive and communicative competencies that – once integrated with knowledge and dispositions – render individuals capable of acting in constructive ways in society (Chaux, Lleras & Velásquez, 2004; Ministerio de Educación de Colombia, 2004a; Ruiz-Silva & Chaux, 2005). Traditionally, citizenship education has been mainly based on knowledge and values. The emphasis on knowledge assumes that those who are more knowledgeable about citizenship (for example, about rights, structure of the state, or national symbols) will use such knowledge to be better citizens. The emphasis on values assumes that by helping students to understand the meaning of given values and reminding them of the importance thereof (for example, by means of billboards, songs, or fables) their actions will get to be more consistent with those values. However, neither vast knowledge of nor elaborate discourses on values seem to easily translate into actions (Chaux, 2002; Kohn, 1997). By contrast, competency-based citizenship education focuses on what students are capable of doing. In fact, the core of this training is to provide opportunities for students to develop their competencies by putting them into practice in contexts of increasing complexity. This opens up the possibility of redirecting citizenship education by aiming at better citizens – not only on account of their knowledge, assessments and discourses – but on account of their actions.

Although the term citizenship competencies has become relevant only recently, its foundations have gradually built up over several decades

under various names (e.g. social abilities, socio-emotional competencies). Several authors have made significant contributions to an understanding of what the processes involved in developing these competencies are like (e.g. Denham & Burton, 2003; Hoffman, 2002; Selman, 1980; Yeates, Schultz & Selman, 1991). Additionally, a number of studies have shown direct and significant relationships between these competencies (or the lack thereof) and constructive (or destructive) social behaviors. For example, aggression in boys and girls has been related with difficulties in feeling empathy, handling anger constructively, creating alternatives in a conflictive situation, adequately interpreting others' intentions, responding assertively to insults, and handling conflicts constructively (e.g. Cepeda & Chaux, 2006; Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 1990; Slaby & Guerra, 1989; Torrente & Kanayet, 2007) – all of which are citizenship competencies. Despite progress in understanding these competencies and their relevance in promoting more pacific, inclusive and democratic interactions, however, it is still not clear what the best teaching strategies are for developing them. The main purpose of this paper is to contribute towards bridging this practical gap.

The Colombian Ministry of Education has taken on a leading role, both at the national and international levels, in promoting citizenship competencies in the education system (Cox, Jaramillo & Reimers, 2005; Reimers & Villegas-Reimers, 2005). The Colombian citizenship competencies program includes: 1) Basic Citizenship Competencies Standards which specify the minimum performance expected of students at the various grades of formal education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2004a); 2) a country-wide test that seeks to measure the extent to which said standards are being met (ICFES, 2003; Torrente & Kanayet, 2007); and 3) the identification, evaluation



and dissemination of significant experiences (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2004b) and of existing formal programs for the promotion of citizenship competencies (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). One such program is Aulas en Paz, a multi-component program for promoting coexistence and preventing violence through the development of citizenship competencies (Chaux, 2007; Ramos, Nieto & Chaux, 2007).

Inspired by other international multi-component programs such as Fast Track (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999) and the Montreal Prevention Program (Chaux, 2005; Tremblay et al., 1995), Aulas en Paz seeks to prevent aggression by combining a universal approach (primary prevention) and a targeted approach (secondary prevention). The universal component is a classroom component that seeks to develop citizenship competencies associated with aggression, conflict handling, and bullying in second- to fifth-grade students over 40 sessions per year. Twenty-four of these sessions are devoted exclusively to citizenship competencies while 16 are held as part of the language class, where the development of language competencies is integrated with citizenship competencies. The targeted component includes 18 weekly sessions aimed at reinforcing citizenship competencies and held in extracurricular activities, in heterogeneous groups formed by two boys/girls with recurrent aggression problems, and four who stand out due to their prosocial behaviors. It also includes four workshops per year with all the parents and four visits per year to the homes of those students with the greatest aggression problems. These workshops and visits seek to reinforce the development of citizenship competencies that is taking place both in the classroom and in the heterogeneous groups, as well as to provide support to parents so that they may foster the practice of citizenship competencies, especially vis-à-vis issues relating to aggression, conflicts and norms.

The evaluation of the Aulas en Paz program has included several stages and components. In the previous issue of this Journal (Vol. 1 issue 1), Ramos, Nieto & Chaux (2007) presented the changes observed in boys/girls who participated in the first year of implementation of the full model. This paper seeks to supplement the previous one by summing up the main findings from the formative evaluation conducted during the first two years of implementation of the program. This formative evaluation sought to make a qualitative analysis of how the activities were working out in practice and, based on this, to identify the necessary adjustments that had to be made to the activities and to the program as a whole. In what follows, we briefly summarize the methodology underlying this formative evaluation and present, in the way of results, the teaching strategies that have been found most useful for developing the core citizenship competencies of our program, i.e. 1) handling anger, 2) empathy, 3) distance-taking, 4) creative generation of alternatives, 5) considering consequences, 6) active listening, 7) assertiveness, and 8) questioning beliefs.



## Method

### *Participants*

The formative evaluation was conducted in three urban educational institutions of low socioeconomic level: one public school, one public school under concession management by a private association, and one private school with nearly all students supported by public sector grants. The participants were all the students in 11 classes (440 students, approximately half of them girls) distributed into grades 2 (3 classes), 3 (2 classes), 4 (2 classes), and 5 (4 classes). Ages ranged between 7 and 13 years.

### *Procedure*

The process of designing, implementing, evaluating and adjusting the activities always began with the preliminary designs developed by our work team. These designs were subsequently subjected to discussion with teams from the three schools (8 teachers, one headmistress, one counselor and one social worker), with whom new adjustments were agreed upon. More than 70% of the activities were implemented by the schools' staffs with non-participating observation by members of our research team. The remaining activities were implemented by members of our team, sometimes with observation by school staff.

### *Method of Analysis*

Notes taken in field journals by the observers were subjected to qualitative analysis by members of our team. These analyses sought to identify the consistency between the design of the activity and its implementation (i.e. fidelity), as well as the consistency between the activity implemented and the following teaching principles: 1) learning by doing (i.e. to what extent does the activity provide for students' practicing the competencies it purports to develop?); 2)

motivation and significant learning (i.e. to what extent are students motivated by the activity and to what extent does the activity provide for their establishing connections with their own lives?); 3) level of difficulty adjusted to the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) (i.e. does the level of difficulty of the activity lie between what they can do on their own, without any help, and what they can do with guidance from an adult or help from a classmate?); 4) reflection (i.e. how much reflection is fostered by the activity?); 5) social interaction (i.e. how much social interaction is achieved during the activity?); and 6) learning by observation (i.e. how many opportunities are afforded to students for observing how the competency they seek to develop is put into practice by others?). In order to ascertain the levels of coherence with these teaching principles, field journals were contrasted with matrices that determined the existence of high, average or low coherence with each teaching principle. The results of this analysis of coherence are found in Chaux et al. (2006), Cubillos (2006), Ramos (2007) and Zuluaga (2006).

Lastly, based on the results of the analysis of coherence with teaching principles, we contrasted the various teaching strategies we have tried out for promoting citizenship competencies. This final contrast enabled us to identify the teaching strategies presented below, which are those that have been found most useful for promoting the eight core citizenship competencies of the Aulas en Paz program.

## Findings

### *1) Handling Anger*

Losing control because of anger may lead people to hurt others or themselves. People who are competent in handling anger are capable of responding to this emotion without inflicting harm. Thus, handling anger is not about making it disappear, since this is neither possible nor desirable. Conversely, it is about people being capable of handling their anger rather than



being handled by it (Chaux, Lleras & Velásquez, 2004).

### Recognizing Anger

To a large extent, handling anger depends on the ability to recognize and name anger in oneself. This presupposes being able to identify the bodily signs associated with this emotion, knowing how to differentiate the various levels of intensity of my anger, and knowing how to recognize the situations that usually make anger arise in me (Chaux, Lleras & Velásquez, 2004). This recognition is particularly important during childhood, since at this stage the identification of emotions may be limited to experiencing either pleasant or unpleasant bodily sensations, without the ability to clearly differentiate and name the emotion felt. For example, when experiencing emotions as different as sadness, anger and guilt, many children are only able to identify feeling “upset.” We have tried several teaching strategies so that children may recognize signs of anger in their own and in others’ bodies, as well as situations that give rise to this emotion. One of these strategies consists in having children tell their classmates of recent situations in which they have felt anger and how they have felt it in their body. This strategy may be applied by means of questions and answers, while simultaneously working on active listening.

Another strategy tried out consists in reading stories where a character feels angry, and especially stories making explicit reference to bodily signs so that children may begin to identify them. For example, after reading “Ana está furiosa” [Ana is Furious] (Nöstlinger, 2001), a story which describes in detail what the character looks like when she is angry, the children recognized that her face “turned red as a tomato and her hair stood on end” and related this

with situations in which they had felt something similar. Another activity is “The Thermometer” (Kreidler, 1997), which consists in narrating an actual or hypothetical situation and checking on a thermometer how angry they would get and what the bodily signs would be. In still another activity they are asked to identify bodily signs in other people, such as their parents or teacher. Emotions may also be identified in a more experiential way, such as by asking students to concentrate on the sensations they feel in different parts of the body while they recall a recent situation involving anger and to then make a drawing of this visualization. When exhibiting their drawings, children identified anger as felt in the stomach, “hard as a football” or as “a sea full of exploding fish;” in the heart as “a whirlpool;” in the neck, arms, hands and legs – which all felt “hard;” on the face, “which turns red and hot,” and on the teeth and fists, which felt “clenched”.

### Lessening the Intensity of Anger

The second requirement for handling anger is the development of specific techniques to lessen its intensity. In working with children, it has been very useful to associate these techniques with names or images that describe them and allow them to be easily remembered. “*Tuga the Turtle*,” for example, adapted from a technique frequently used in cognitive-behaviorist therapy (Robin, 1976), consists in taking some “time out” inside the shell (represented by putting one’s arms above one’s head) in order to breathe deeply, count backwards, and calm down. In our experience, children not only learned the strategy but also, in several actual situations involving anger, put it into practice and suggested to their classmates that they should do the same (Ramos, Nieto & Chaux, 2007).

Another technique that turned out to



be very valuable with third-grade children was HaReDiM, which means: **Háblate** (saying soothing words to oneself), **Relájate** (breathing deeply), **Distráete** (thinking of pleasant situations, counting backwards), **Imagina** (imagining a thermometer and how the mercury column gradually falls, or an ice cube gradually melting). Other examples in the fourth and fifth grades are “respibomba,” which consists in breathing deeply as if inflating and deflating a balloon, and “tensi,” which consists in tensing and relaxing the muscles. The last two names were created by the children themselves, an act which facilitated the use of the technique (Zuluaga, 2006). In other experiences, children not only invented names but also their own techniques, which were useful for them to deal with anger and calming down, such as “*Ada la gata calmada*” [Ana, the Peaceful Cat], which consists in withdrawing from the situation that gives rise to anger to a pleasant place, thinking of clouds, or praying (the latter not very usual in these schools or in our program). Opening up opportunities for creativity provides for a better appropriation of the techniques.

#### Practicing How to Handle Anger

The third aspect in the development of handling anger, i.e. the creation of opportunities for putting this competency into practice, has been the greatest challenge. Obviously, in order to be able to handle anger, first anger has to be felt. For this reason we have tried different strategies to arouse the emotion in a teaching context. The first strategy involved hypothetical cases that resemble real-life situations and are dealt with through role-plays (i.e. simulations in which different students, either in pairs or larger groups, enact different roles in a conflictive situation, but with no pre-established script except for the initial description of the situation; Ossa, 2004). Although this strategy has been very successful with adults (who frequently involve themselves in the roles and even get to feel some anger at critical points in

the simulation), it has not been so useful for practicing the anger handling competency with children. Children are able to enact the situation, but they rarely get sufficiently involved so as to experience anger. For example, in one of these role-plays, they were laughing while counting backwards or playing *Tuga the Turtle*. This renders the practice of the anger handling competency non-significant.

We have also tried to get students to practice this competency through rather more personal role plays. The only case rehearsed, a role play in which three children had to make fun of another one in a math lesson, turned out to be too risky, ending in aggression and with one of the participants crying. It is necessary to strike a balance between situations that are too hypothetical and fail to create anger, and those which are too real and create so much anger as to become unmanageable for the person who experiences it and who is not yet in control of the competency.

An option other than arousing the emotion is to have the children themselves bring the emotion to the teaching context based on recent experiences they have gone through and in which they have felt anger. In this strategy, children tell their classmates what happened, their emotion, how they felt it in the body and how they reacted. Based on this narrative, a “time travel” (role-play) is enacted where the student that felt anger has a second chance to handle it. By starting from a real-life experience, a connection with daily life is established which increases the likelihood that the competency will be practiced when the child experiences a similar situation. On one occasion, for example, while engaged in role playing one of the children enacted a conflict that he himself had gone through in the previous session, and during this enactment he was able to practice the Tuga the Turtle technique and then calmly reflect on what had bothered him.

During the initial stages, when children



are just beginning to acquire the competency, it has been necessary to create opportunities so that they may put it into practice in the classroom in a relatively controlled situation. However, in order for competencies to strengthen, it is also essential to use any opportunities that may spontaneously arise in situations of daily life, such as, for example, during actual conflicts among children. For this to happen, it has been very important for everyone around the children (teachers, parents, classmates, siblings, etc.) to know the techniques that the children are learning so as to remind them of these at the precise moment when they need them.

## 2) Empathy

Empathy is an emotional competency that consists in the ability to feel what others feel, or at least to feel something attuned to what others may be feeling (Hoffman, 2002). For example, somebody shows empathy if he/she hurts when someone else suffers or if he/she rejoices in the good things that happen to others. According to Feshbach (1992), empathy is a function of three essential factors: (a) the *cognitive* ability to recognize other people's *affective* clues in order to be able to identify their emotions, (b) the possibility of assuming the other's point of view, and (c) the *affective* ability to feel the other's emotions (emotional sensitivity). This competency is fundamental because, among other reasons, if somebody hurts because others feel pain, he/she is less likely to inflict that pain. And if he/she does, in all likelihood he/she will be more prone to do something to repair the grievance. Additionally, if he/she sees someone suffering, he/she is more likely to feel compassion and be ready to do something to alleviate the suffering (Chaux, 2004). For these reasons, the finding that those who are more prone to intervening to help others feel more empathy while those more prone to abusing or mistreating others feel less empathy (Eisenberg et al., 2002; Parra, 2005) is not surprising.

## Emotional Understanding

Emotional understanding implies, among other processes, recognizing emotions in oneself and in others, being able to name them and identifying the processes that trigger them (Denham & Burton, 2003). To make it easier for children to recognize emotions and to be able to name them, different activities were tried out, such as, for example, emotion showers and playing emotion statue. In the first of these activities, children were asked to think about names of emotions, then write them down on a joint list, and think about some situations that may trigger some of them. Children intuitively mentioned several emotions but they did not know what they referred to; therefore, it was essential for the teachers to have the knowledge required to give definitions. In the second activity, children practiced expressing emotions non-verbally: they played "statue" – i.e. they were not to speak and were to remain still – and when the teacher called the name of an emotion each child had to make the facial and bodily expression as if he/she was feeling that emotion.

Some activities sought to have children identify the situations that triggered a given emotion either in them or in others. For example, based on face drawings expressing different emotions (sadness, joy, anger, fear, pride, gratefulness, compassion), children were required to write about an occasion when they felt two of those emotions and then ask their classmates about situations when the latter had felt them. In this activity, the teacher should be able to give definitions of the emotions and provide examples of occasions when he/she has experienced them.

Another alternative was to use an emotional clock which instead of hours shows faces expressing different emotions, and which has two hands in the center. Children were presented with a number of situations so that they could point to the emotion(s) they would feel if they went through something similar – for example, if a friend does not invite them to his/



her birthday party, or if a teacher tells them something pleasant.

All these activities were high motivating and significant for the children. They all sought to expand children's recognition and emotional language, as well as their understanding of what triggers emotions in them and in others. Both of these are fundamental for developing empathy.

#### Empathy for Characters in Children' Literature

Children's literature can be used to encourage children to practice identifying emotions both in themselves and in others, and to develop their empathy in general situations or in specific instances of aggression or conflict. One strategy consists in stopping the reading at specific points to analyze the characters' emotions and those emotions that the reading arouses in the children. Some of the questions that may be put forward are: What emotions do the characters in the story feel? How do they express their emotions? What do you feel for those people in the story? Have you lived through something similar to what happens in the story? What did you feel when it happened to you?

The connection with the children's own life can be made, for instance, by suggesting that the children write a letter to one of the characters in the story in which, taking their emotions into account, they tell him/her a situation where something similar happened to them. Another way to link stories with the students' reality is to ask students, prior to the reading, to remember and tell about situations in which they have experienced something similar to what they will later find in the story – for example, when they have felt ashamed or have been newcomers to a group.

In our experience, practically all the

children get highly motivated with children's literature, get really involved in the narratives and manage to identify themselves with the characters' emotions. This makes this strategy highly valuable for developing empathy.

#### Empathy for Actual Individuals

Several of the activities we have tried seek to create opportunities for children to feel empathy for actual persons who may be close to or even far from them. For example, some of the activities that have aroused the most interest in the students are those that require them to think about what their relatives, classmates, or even the teacher may be feeling after actual events of aggression. For example, when analyzing bullying, most of them got deeply involved in the activities that required them to think about what their classmates, both victims and bullies, might be feeling. This also intended to have them question their complacent attitude vis-à-vis bullying and their role as passive observers (Salmivalli, et al., 1996). It was also very impressive to have them imagine what the victims of bullying might feel in other countries, about whom they had heard through stories posted on the Internet. In this case, the children were particularly motivated when they learned that they could communicate with them .

#### Empathy for Other Animals

Another strategy that we have not used but that could prove to be effective consists in activities that foster empathy for non-human animals. There is a huge potential in this type of strategies due to the close relationship that children establish with animals, a relationship that has even been used in psychotherapeutic processes (Ascione, 2005). They could also contribute to developing the ethics of animal care (Noddings, 1992).



### 3) *Distance-taking*

Distance-taking or defocusing is a cognitive competency that consists in the ability to understand others' point of view or to mentally put oneself in someone else's shoes (Selman, 1980). If others' different points of view about a similar situation are managed to be understood, it is much more likely that mutual benefit agreements, as well as peaceful and constructive interaction will be reached (Chaux, 2004).

#### Gestalt Images, Graphical Situations, and Mysterious Situations

Gestalt images, graphical situations and mysterious situations are three strategies that seek to have children practice distance-taking. One example of the typical Gestalt figures is that in which either a duck or a rabbit is seen depending on how it is viewed. After showing the image to the children, they are asked to tell what they see so that they can realize by themselves that they may see different things depending on where they place their attention. One example of a graphical situation is that of "folded drawings" in which at first children are shown only one part of the picture with incomplete information, and then the other part that shows what was actually happening. One part of the drawing, for instance, shows someone pushing someone else. The unfolded part shows a potted plant that was about to fall exactly on top of the person being pushed. When children see the first part of the drawing, they usually believe that someone is pushing somebody else in order to harm him or her. Then they realize that he/she is actually sparing the other person from being hit by the potted plant. In the end they are asked why their initial answers were wrong. In this manner, they are made to reflect upon the fact that sometimes there is not enough information about a situation

and that this may lead to erroneous judgments.

Mysterious situations (Feshbach et al, 1983) are unusual situations that students are required to explain. In one of them, for example, Casandra is going out in a long-sleeved cardigan when the weather is getting terribly hot (32 degrees Centigrade). The boy/girl has to mentally put himself/herself in Casandra's role, in this case, in order to identify the reasons that led her to behave like that. This becomes a kind of challenge that must be met, and their answers are varied and plentiful.

In all these activities we have found it necessary to encourage children to relate what happens when observing this type of pictures with conflicts among people, specifically with the fact that conflicts often arise because two people interpret the same situation in two different ways. According to our experience, if this bridge is not made explicit, the activity is likely to fail meeting the objective of being a metaphor or an enactment of the problems that arise when the others' point of view is not taken into account. This bridge may be laid by asking the children, either before or after analyzing the picture, if they have ever had any disagreements with other children because they perceive the same situation in a different way – for example, something that one took to be joke was taken by the other as an offense.

#### Changing Roles

An interesting variation in role-playing consists in asking children to first take on one role in a situation of conflict and then to reverse roles. The situation may be simple: Luisa claims that Pedro took her eraser away from her and she is asking him to return it; Pedro thinks the eraser belongs to him because he found it on the floor and he does not want to give it back.



Luisa's and Pedro's roles are given to two different children for them to enact what will happen with this conflict, and then they are asked to reverse roles. This is a highly useful activity because it actually forces children to change their point of view. This change may even be made using an actual conflict and asking them to play the role of the person with whom they have a conflict.

#### *4) Creation of Alternatives, and 5) Consideration of Consequences*

The creation of alternatives and the consideration of consequences are two closely related cognitive competencies, since both refer to parts of the decision-making process in situations such as interpersonal conflicts or collective decisions. The former refers to the ability to creatively imagine different solutions in the face of a given situation (Chaux, 2004). Some studies have found that if this competency proves difficult to develop, the person is more likely to resort to aggressive solutions since it is difficult for him/her to imagine other ways out (e.g. Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 1990; Slaby & Guerra, 1988).

After several possible solutions for a situation are presented, the next step is to choose the best alternative for the specific case. This is when a consideration of consequences comes into the picture. This competency refers to the ability to consider the various effects that each alternative action may have (Chaux, 2004). Once the effects of each alternative are clear, it is possible to choose the alternative with the best effects for all those that may be affected by the decision.

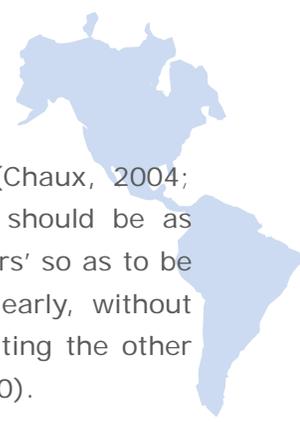
#### Brainstorming

Brainstorming has been the base strategy for developing the creation of alternatives. This

strategy requires students to give the largest possible number of ideas about how to deal with a situation, irrespective of whether they think the ideas are good or bad. To present this strategy to the students, we tried to give it an attractive name (we used the English name, Brainstorming) so that it could be easily remembered and internalized by the children. After a conflict is presented, a contest is held where the winner is the pair or group that manages to think of the largest number of alternatives for handling that conflict in a given time. This application of the strategy enabled students to advance from suggesting two or three solutions to suggesting up to thirteen in five minutes. The winner in this contest is also the group or pair that proposes alternatives that are different from those suggested by others. After presenting the solutions, each group shares them with the rest of the class; this enables students to listen to alternatives they had not thought about and thus increase their solution repertory.

#### Identification and Analysis of Consequences

After the brainstorming session, when students have identified various possible alternatives, they are asked to put forward all the consequences that each alternative might lead to. They are also asked to analyze the alternatives, specifying whether these would contribute to escalating or de-escalating the conflict, and what the consequences would be for each of the parties involved (for example, how would each of them feel?) and for the relationship (for example, would it be possible for the relationship to continue, or would there be resentment between the parties?). In the case of younger students, we have observed that a very useful tool for the consideration of consequences is the use of puppet shows where different solutions for a conflict are enacted. Students are expected to recognize the consequences of each solution for



the relationship and to identify the most useful solution.

### Classroom Agreements and Norms

Finally, we have found it very useful to practice the competencies dealing with the creation of alternatives and the consideration of consequences in daily classroom situations, such as the processes that involve the collective construction of norms and agreements for the classroom. The students identify the actions or behaviors they would like to change so that the lessons may proceed in an orderly fashion (for example, not talking while others talk in order to be able to pay attention); this then becomes one of the classroom norms. Later, the students participate in the construction of agreements concerning what will happen when someone fails to comply with this norm. To construct these agreements, they should suggest the largest possible number of alternatives (creation of alternatives) and choose one of them together, bearing in mind that it should have positive consequences for the student that breached the norm as well as for the others; it should also ensure that the lesson may proceed undisturbed (consideration of consequences). Thus, they practice both competencies in a real-life situation that affects them directly.

### 6) *Assertiveness*

Assertiveness implies defending personal rights and expressing thoughts, needs, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest, and adequate ways, without infringing others' rights (Lange & Jakubowski, 1980). Assertiveness is a communicative competency that may be evidenced, among other situations, in the way we respond to an offense, to a bullying situation or to a conflict. Being assertive does not imply either being submissive or reacting aggressively

in any one of these situations (Chaux, 2004; Ruiz-Silva & Chaux, 2005). We should be as conscious of our rights as of others' so as to be able to express our message clearly, without degrading, humiliating or dominating the other person (Lange & Jakubowski, 1980).

Velasquez (2005) contrasted two interventions based on different teaching approaches that sought to encourage assertiveness in fifth graders. He found that both managed to get children to learn how to act assertively and demonstrate that knowledge in role playing. However, neither intervention succeeded in getting them to include that learning in their daily interactions (Velasquez, 2005). This work prompted the need for designing more concrete strategies to develop this competency that should aim at making students familiar with what assertiveness is, and to practice it in their daily life.

### The "I Message"

A very common reaction when we feel attacked and assailed is to reply with further attacks, placing the burden of the answer on what the other person did to us. This normally ends in a number of attacks and counterattacks, since this type of message tends to blame the other person (Kreidler, 1997; Lieber, 1998). The "*I message*" attempts to change this attack-and-counterattack dynamic by means of assertively communicating needs and emotions, so that the person receiving them can understand what the other feels and needs, without being hurt and without the relationship being affected. To this end, some steps are proposed which are summarized in the following format: "*I feel... when... because...*" (Kreidler, 1997) for example: "*I feel angry when you tell my secrets to others because the others may make fun of me.*" Through these I messages, the receiver has the opportunity to realize that he did something that



the issuer did not like, and is free to change or modify his behavior.

In our experience, we have observed that this strategy leads to the reflection that it is best to aim criticism at behaviors rather than at the person as such, which is an essential trait of assertive behavior. However, the strategy is not so effective in practice, mainly because when children follow the steps of the *I message*, they usually do it in an artificial way (Velasquez, 2005). In addition, the strategy is very complex for the younger ones, especially when they are required to apply it in real situations.

### Symbols for Assertiveness

In our experience, the use of simple tactics associated with concrete symbols has been extremely useful to get children to apply the knowledge they have acquired about assertiveness to their daily lives. One of the most valuable examples in the case of smaller children is "*DiNo the Dinosaur*" [T's Note: "Di No" in Spanish literally means "Say No"]. This technique is a more simplified version of the "I message" which involves first saying "No" kindly, then the name of the person and the specific behavior that we do not want him/her to continue displaying. Thus, there is a concrete symbol for the "I message" that is closer to the children and that may be visually represented, for example, by a picture of DiNo the dinosaur that can be seen by all.

In the case of older children, it is necessary to explore the symbols that may be significant in their contexts. This is because, given their condition as preteens, they are likely to reject those tactics associated with symbols that may seem too childish to them. This may be accomplished by inviting them to name their

strategies themselves, associate them to the symbols they prefer, and apply them to their actual interaction.

### Group Assertiveness

The strategy of creating "collective assertiveness" is essential in situations such as bullying, since students often prefer not to get involved in situations of aggression between their classmates for fear of retaliation against them (for example, being attacked) (Hernandez, 2005). Assertiveness stemming from the group entails that they all act together in order to stop whichever aggressions may occur. One example of group assertiveness tactics is "*Coro el Loro*" [T's Note: a reference to repeating in chorus like a parrot] that consists in everyone saying "*Stop*" in chorus in the event of a bullying incident or when a conflict is escalating. This has enabled those involved to better respond to the call than if it was given by a single person. It also prevents the risk of having someone acting on his/her own and being subsequently rejected or attacked.

### 7) *Active Listening*

Active listening is a communicative competency that involves paying attention to what others are telling us and showing them that they are being listened to (Ruiz-Silva & Chau, 2005). This competency is very relevant for relationships given that when a person is listening attentively to the other, he/she is more likely to understand what the latter is trying to convey. This in turn enables the other person to perceive that there is an interest in listening to his/her point of view. Feeling that the other person is interested in our own position and is not only defending his/her own contributes to creating an environment in which each is able to say what he/she thinks and feels, and makes it easier to negotiate and come to agreements.



Active listening includes several techniques of varying complexity: 1) nonverbal communication and adopting a certain body posture that helps convey to the other person the message that we are really paying attention to him/her; 2) clarification, i.e. asking questions to go deeper into and better understand what the other is trying to say; 3) paraphrasing, i.e. saying in one's own words the message we have just heard in order to ensure that we understood it properly; and 4) reflection, which entails verbally acknowledging the other's emotions in order to show him/her that we understand what he/she is feeling.

In our experience, we have observed that it is very important to bear in mind the complexity of the technique and the students' zone of proximal development when it comes to designing strategies for developing active listening. In second and third grades, students manage to practice nonverbal communication and clarification by means of questions, but it is only from the fourth grade onwards that they begin to understand and practice paraphrasing. Reflecting emotions seems to be too complex a technique for elementary students and, in some cases, even for adults.

### Modeling Active Listening

Modeling consists in demonstrating active listening in front of the students so that they may explicitly observe it and learn to clearly identify when it is happening and when it is not. We have tried such modeling through puppets, role playing, or by the way in which the teacher reacts to students' interventions. In our experience, although modeling is important, it is not sufficient for developing active listening. It is necessary for students to have the opportunity to practice the competency.

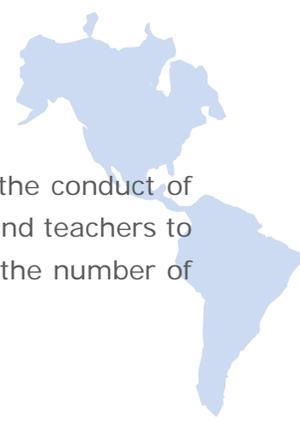
### Active Listening and Role-Playing

Active listening is frequently developed by means of activities in which students are given an explanation of what paraphrasing is; then, they are given a few sentences (e.g. It's getting hot today) and are asked to say how they would paraphrase them (e.g. Kreidler, 1997). Although in these cases the students may learn how to put the competency into practice, the fact that the exercise is unrelated to their daily life makes it non-significant for them and prevents them from using it on a day- to-day basis.

According to our experience, active listening is more easily developed if the activities involving hypothetical cases are supplemented with exercises in which the student is required to put it into practice in the context of an actual conversation that is significant for him/her. In role- plays based on real situations rather than on hypothetical cases, practicing the competency may become much more significant for the students given that through the use of cases closer to their own lives, they may identify themselves more easily with the story and appropriate the role they are enacting.

### Personal Histories

The socialization of students' personal histories renders the lesson more significant for them. This activity can also be used as an opportunity for practicing active listening. For example, in one session we ask them to tell each other any conflicts they may have recently experienced. In these cases, the members of the group should actively listen to their classmates, paying attention to the case, asking questions to clarify what happened, and paraphrasing to ensure that they understand the story. This activity not only provides for practicing the competency, but also contributes to the stories



being taken seriously by the class.

### Debates and Interviews

Debates and interviews allow the students to practice paying attention, clarifying through questions and paraphrasing – all of which are components of active listening. During interviews, for example, when students have to interview their parents about bullying situations at school that they either witnessed or suffered when they were children, active listening helps the student to follow the thread of the respondent's story and get from him/her the required information.

In debates, active listening helps students to understand the other's point of view and be able to argue taking account of the counterarguments. For example, with fifth graders we implemented a debate about how a character in the children's book "Angélica" (Bojunga, 1996) should deal with the ridicule he was receiving. Before presenting their arguments, each student had to paraphrase the idea of the student who had spoken before (who usually held the opposite view) and was not allowed to present his/her own idea until the other had accepted that his/her arguments were being properly paraphrased. This process has enabled students to move on from focusing on upholding their position, to listening and analyzing the other's point of view and manage to assess some of his/her arguments, sometimes even changing their position.

### Reinforcements for Paraphrasing

We have occasionally integrated paraphrasing into a system of reinforcements, assigning scores to students when they can tell the class, in their own words, what was said by the previous person. This has not only contributed to putting into practice the competency of active

listening, but has also facilitated the conduct of the lessons by allowing students and teachers to listen to the others and reducing the number of interruptions from the class.

### *8) Questioning Beliefs*

Aggressive behaviors are commonly legitimized by a certain type of beliefs. It is crucial to question this type of beliefs, especially in sociocultural contexts where violence is thought to be an effective way of dealing with conflicts. Some authors have demonstrated the relationship existing between beliefs that legitimize aggression and aggressive behaviors. Huesmann & Guerra (1997) found that certain type of beliefs (for example: "If I am rough, it's all right to say disgusting things to others") become relatively stable during the initial years of elementary education and exert a powerful influence on subsequent social behavior. A strong relationship has also been found between beliefs that legitimize aggression, exposure to environmental violence, and aggressive behaviors – with beliefs being important mediators between exposure to violence and aggressive behaviors (Chaux Arboleda & Rincon, under review; Torrente & Kanayet, 2007). Based on this, we have tried different strategies aimed at changing beliefs that legitimize aggression.

### Arguments against Beliefs

Questioning preexisting beliefs is essential if change is to be attained. Guerra & Slaby (1990) used this strategy with teenagers imprisoned for having committed violent crimes. In their workshops, the youths had to present arguments against some popular beliefs that legitimize aggression in front of the whole group. In the end, they not only changed their beliefs but also their behaviors (Guerra & Slaby, 1990).



In our experience, we have implemented some activities resembling those of Guerra & Slaby (1990). In one of them, the children had to identify the reasons why a belief might be false, and present them to the rest of the class. Another activity consisted in convincing a fictitious character, "Tivo el perro impulsivo" [Tivo, the Impulsive Dog], that his beliefs were wrong. A few examples of the beliefs used in both types of activities include: "sometimes it's fun to pester other boys or girls," "it's all right to attack someone if he/she attacked you first," "boys and girls who attack are brave" or "I need to attack if I am to be respected." Even though this strategy does not provide for students' choosing whether they are for or against a particular belief, in our experience, they generally get involved and manage to create sound arguments against these beliefs.

#### Analysis of Consequences and Creation of Alternatives

The activities presented in the previous strategy involved telling the children what beliefs were correct and which were not. A different way in which we have tried to question beliefs is through the analysis of alternatives and consequences when dealing with different situations. For example, a very common belief among children (as well as in adults) is that when one is attacked there are only two options: either being submissive or reacting aggressively. This usually leads to justifying the use of aggression as a defense mechanism (Chaux, 2003). The ability to create alternatives provides for discovering that those two ways are not the only ones, but that there are many others that would allow the situation to be handled in a creative way. In addition, the analysis of consequences leads children to realize by themselves that aggression is not usually the best method because, even though it may bring

short-term benefits (e.g. stopping abuse), in the long run it ends up creating more negative than positive consequences (e.g. a deterioration of relationships or the risk of stronger aggressions). The interesting point about this strategy is that the belief gets to be questioned but it spares those who held it from feeling under attack.

#### Argumentative Debates

The third strategy we have used are debates in which positions for and against a certain belief are upheld. In these debates, the participants may be either assigned the positions or left to choose on their own the one that seems best to them. In our experience, however, we have found that the latter option involves the risk of reaffirming beliefs that we expected to be questioned. For example, a debate in which the students defend a strongly-rooted belief may lead to their reaffirming it, without listening or taking any counterarguments into account. That is why debates should be handled so as to force students to eventually assume positions contrary to those they held before. For example, they may be required to reverse positions and argue in favor of what they were previously attacking. Another option is to analyze the arguments for and against a given position. The main point is that if they are given the opportunity to choose their position at the beginning of the debate, they are likely to become more convinced of that position and no real questioning will take place.

There is wide field open for exploration in the area of working on changing beliefs. For example, it would be interesting to analyze justifying beliefs or "self-justifications" in greater depth. These are explanations that people give to themselves to appease their conscience when they have done or plan to do an action that may be considered immoral (Bandura, 1999). These justifying beliefs are essential in the cognitive process that



encourages people to think that what they are doing is not so wrong. Thus, children are likely not to feel guilty for having behaved aggressively because, for example, they may think that “it is not so serious because everyone does it” or because “the other started it.” Although Bandura (1999) has shown that these self-justifying beliefs underlie the worst acts of violence performed by human beings, there are still very few teaching strategies to question them (Bustamante, A., 2007; MacAllister et al., 2000).

### Discussion

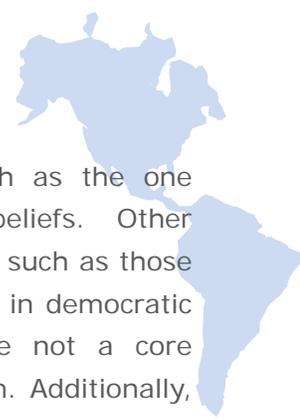
The competency-based approach seems to be a highly valuable alternative to guide training for democracy and peaceful coexistence. In the last few years significant developments have taken place in this field, especially in terms of identifying basic competencies for democratic participation, peaceful coexistence, and the exercise of pluralism (e.g. Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2004a). However, specifying key competencies is only a first step. It is also essential to identify the best teaching strategies for developing them.

The field of citizenship competencies is so new that fully embracing a teaching approach that prevails in the other academic areas – such as constructivism or any of its variations – is very risky, to say the least. A detailed analysis of specific teaching strategies for developing specific competencies appears to be required. Perhaps, rather than a theoretical-conceptual analysis of these teaching strategies, at this point in the field it seems more relevant to try them out and learn from the way they work in practice. Formative evaluations of programs provide a very valuable opportunity to conduct these analyses, precisely because this type of evaluation seeks to improve the program based on a rigorous and detailed analysis of how it works in practice. This is the

approach we selected for the Aulas en Paz Multi-component Program.

Practice accompanied by observation and analysis has led us to identify some teaching strategies that seem to be very valuable for developing several of the competencies that are most relevant for peaceful coexistence. These strategies can be easily integrated into curricula and educational programs. However, for practically all the competencies under analysis, it seems to be as important to create opportunities in the curriculum for students to learn and practice these competencies, as it is to take advantage of the opportunities that may spontaneously arise in daily school life relationships. For example, real conflicts among students, or even between students and teachers, afford very valuable opportunities for practicing several of the competencies analyzed here – such as handling anger, distance-taking, creative generation of alternatives, listening, or assertiveness. Teachers might miss the opportunity to practice these competencies if they ignore the conflicts, punish those involved in an authoritarian way, or even if they solve the conflicts for the students without giving them first a chance to solve them on their own.

In any case, it is clear that teachers play a crucial role in the development of students' competencies. Although the goal is not for teachers to solve the problems for the students, but rather to have students learn how to solve them on their own, the teacher's role is essential in: 1) modeling the use of these competencies; 2) creating opportunities for competencies to be practiced; 3) identifying and taking advantage of the opportunities for practicing that arise spontaneously; and 4) promoting a classroom atmosphere consistent with these competencies. This suggests that one of the next steps should be to identify the best ways in which to provide



support both to teachers-in-training and teachers-in-service, so that they may better fulfill this role.

Some limitations of the formative evaluations underlying the analysis presented herein are worth highlighting. Firstly, the evaluating team was the same as the team who designed the program's activities. Even though this is common practice in formative evaluations, biases cannot be ruled out when it comes to analyzing the strategies implemented.

On the other hand, teachers and the rest of the staff responsible for implementing this phase of the program were highly committed professionals and had a good understanding of citizenship competencies. It is not clear whether the teaching strategies identified as the most effective ones would also be so if they were implemented by less motivated or less capable teachers. In other words, it is likely that these results cannot be generalized to less optimal conditions of application, such as those frequently present when the coverage of a program is expanded.

The developments presented here refer exclusively to children in various elementary grades who live in a particular sociocultural and socioeconomic context (i.e. an urban context characterized by high violence and poverty levels). For this reason, these results cannot be automatically generalized to other contexts, or to other age groups. It is likely that similar competencies are required for peaceful coexistence in other age groups and other contexts. According to Hoffman (2002), for example, empathy is necessary in all contexts, but with varying degrees of complexity depending on age. However, the teaching strategies for developing these competencies are likely to be different.

The results are still quite preliminary concerning

some of the competencies, such as the one associated with questioning beliefs. Other competencies were disregarded – such as those required for actively participating in democratic processes – because they were not a core part of the Aulas en Paz program. Additionally, there is a need to study in greater depth the teaching strategies that provide for the overall development of both citizenship competencies and competencies associated to other academic areas, for example, math, natural sciences, art or physical education (Chaux, Lleras & Velásquez, 2004). The foregoing suggests that the analysis of citizenship competencies from a teaching point of view is still at a very preliminary stage and that a great deal of research such as illustrated by this paper is still to be done. This is the only way in which the promising proposal of citizenship competencies may be strengthened in a teaching context.



## Notes:

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1. Materials designs were led by Gloria Inés Rodríguez (grades 2 and 3), Ana María Velásquez (grade 4), Manuela Jiménez (grade 5), Natalia Zuluaga (grade 5), Marcela Acosta, Andrea Bustamante, Juana Cubillos and Cecilia Ramos (workshops and visits to parents), and Martha Elena Bermúdez, Melisa Castellanos and Ana María Nieto (heterogeneous groups).
2. All the principles, except for the last two, were used in the analysis of all the activities implemented.
3. An attempt was made to do this by e-mail, but no answers were ever received.

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